

December 4, 2009

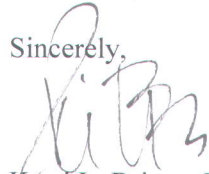
Gene Wilhoit
Executive Director
Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431

Dear Gene,

We have reviewed the draft K-12 Common Core Standards and appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback. The documents were a positive step toward the final core standards and we look forward to receiving the final version in early February 2010. The District remains committed to this project and are actively working toward quickly adopting the new standards.

I appreciate the work required by all involved in providing clear structure and progression. The architecture is clear and easy to follow for those at a state or district level. Teachers, however, may find the organizational structure cumbersome and difficult to use in guiding instruction. The addition of grade-by-grade materials will be very helpful as states begin to implement the standards. The biggest obstacle will be the investment in significant and on-going professional development for teachers. We have begun to consider the options for addressing the areas of greatest concerns for teachers and providing the necessary supports as we transition to these new standards. States may need flexibility to bundle or structure the document without changing the integrity of the standards to meet their needs. Enclosed are responses to the specific questions you raised regarding the draft standards.

We look forward to receiving the final standards and to begin the adoption and implementation processes. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Cathie Carothers, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary and Secondary Education, at cathie.carothers@dc.gov.

Sincerely,


Kerri L. Briggs, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Enclosure

cc: Mayor Adrian Fenty
Deputy Mayor Reinoso
President Raymond

OSSE response to CCSSO questions on draft K-12 Common Core Standards

1. Is the architecture of the draft standards clear and easy to follow? How can we ensure the documents are designed to be accessible for all audiences?

The architecture is clear and easy to follow for those at a state or district level. Teachers may find the organizational structure cumbersome and difficult to use in guiding instruction.

Mathematics: A closer juxtaposition between concepts and skills would be beneficial for teachers. It should be clear what skills are associated with which concepts so teachers are clear on the behaviors associated with mastery of each concept. For every concept there should be at least one clearly identified demonstrable skill. This is well done for some strands (e.g., kindergarten: counting and cardinality, Na) but could be strengthened in others (e.g., kindergarten: base 10 computation, Nb).

English/language arts: Core skills should be aligned to key reading achievements to help teachers plan instruction and align assessments. OSSE was impressed by the clarity of the complexity of text chart, core text types and the language table for each grade band. These documents will be extremely helpful for all audiences.

2. In what ways does this early draft convey a coherent vision of the discipline? What else is needed to enhance a coherent vision?

The draft conveys a clear, coherent vision of the discipline by a thorough coverage of the skills and knowledge needed for mastery. The organization for English/language arts, with key achievements and core skills and application by genre, creates a cohesive and comprehensive look at the discipline and the need for interaction between all the areas. The writing collection and illustrative texts give the tools to measure student work and level of instruction. These will be excellent tools for states, districts, schools, and teachers.

3. To the extent that the early drafts provide progressions for grade level/grade span expectations, does the document present a rigorous, yet reasonable continuum of expectations?

The continuum of expectations is reasonable and rigorous when examining the key achievements and application; however, there is not a clear delineation between the K-3 and 4-5 core skills. These appear very similar for the two bands. While one of the strengths of the draft is the horizontal alignment of the core skills, a clearer progression should be shown from K-3 to 4-5 on the numbered indicators. Also, the additional grade-by-grade features will be very helpful as states begin implementation.

4. Is the language in this early draft clear, concise, and precise? Please identify any areas where more concision and precision is needed.

Mathematics: The language in the “developing coherent understanding” sections should be accessible to teachers. The information is useful but we are concerned that it may not engage teachers if they need to do research before they can understand it. It should be made more accessible, particularly in the earlier grades.

English/language arts: The language in the draft is clear and concise, with two minor concerns. One, the use of “fiction” and “narrative fiction” in different grade bands introduces confusion between the distinction. Two, in the application section, the overviews of the levels before and after add too much text to the page, making it more difficult to digest.

5. If you could add and/or remove ONE concept or skill, what it would be? Please provide an explanation/justification.

Consideration should be given to combining “integrate information from diverse sources” and “build and apply knowledge.” These two incorporate many of the same skills and could be combined.

6. Do you have any other general feedback about the draft standards?

The foundations for K-3 will be extremely useful for teachers and demonstrates a strong phonics approach that follows sound, researched practices.

While the structure and progression of the draft is applauded, implementation of the standards will take tremendous amount of professional development at all levels because of the unique structure and design. States will need to flexibility to bundle or structure the document without changing the integrity of the standards to meet their needs.

Standards serve as guidance for instruction and guidance for assessment and they are the lynchpin aligning and connecting the two. There is some ambiguity in mathematics for what will be assessable. Should the identified skills in mathematics be the focus for assessment?

Will each state have responsibility for deciding how to package the blocks identified for middle and high school into courses? If so, can blocks be split between courses or should blocks be kept intact within specific courses?